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CURRENT STATUS OF LESSER SANDHILL CRANES IN YAKUTIA

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Abstract: In Yakutia, the sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis canadensis*) was considered a common bird in 1957 on the Primorie tundra from the Kolyma River to the Alazeya River. In 1980 the area of the species' supposed breeding grounds within the Kolyma-Indigirka interfluvium comprised 34,600 km². In 1984-85, the breeding grounds extended west to the Sundrun River, with the total area reaching 49,400 km². At present, the westernmost sandhill crane range is on the tundra along the lower reaches of the Berelekh River. This region joins the higher density Siberian crane (*G. leucogeranus*) range, so that the ranges of the sandhill and Siberian cranes are now not only joined, but even overlap each other for great distances. Over the last 50 years, the western frontier of the sandhill crane breeding area has moved to the west, so today the species nests, though in small groups, outside the specified boundary which reaches to the Yana River Delta. The study of the distribution and numbers of sandhill cranes was carried out near the Indigirka tundra in the Kytalyk Resource Reserve during 1993-2007 on a study area that encompassed 1,314 km². A landscape analysis of the habitats used by the sandhill crane was completed. Within the study area, nesting sandhill crane pairs were found on the dry elevated tundra parts as well as on low wet sites of polygonal tundra. During the study on a thoroughly surveyed site as large as 1,111 km², we found 55 pairs (0.49 birds/10 km²) of sandhill cranes along with 11 of their nests, and 43 pairs (0.39 birds/10 km²) of Siberian cranes, along with 40 of their nests. Distances between both species pairs averaged 2,562 m.

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Key words: distribution, *Grus canadensis canadensis*, lesser sandhill crane, Russia, Yakutia.
